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Legislative Leaders Announce Michigan Forest Hearings

LANSING – In honor of the Michigan state forest system's 100th anniversary, Speaker of the House Rick Johnson and Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema today announced a series of joint legislative hearings focusing on the stewardship and management of Michigan's state forest system.

"Michigan has the largest state forest system in the country," Speaker Johnson, R-Leroy, said. "Our state forests are vitally important to Michigan's environment, to our economy, and to our quality of life. The forests are held in the public trust, and we have a responsibility to the taxpayers and to future generations of Michigan families to be good stewards of our environment."

Michigan's first state forests were established in 1903 in Roscommon and Crawford counties. From a humble beginning of 34,000 acres of cutover, burned and abandoned land, the system has grown into nearly 4 million acres of mixed hardwood forests now enjoyed by hunters, fishers and outdoor recreation enthusiasts from across the nation.

"Many people come to Michigan because our state's spectacular landscape is dominated by the Great Lakes and magnificent forests," Majority Leader Sikkema, R-Wyoming, said. "Michigan forests are located at the heart of the largest freshwater ecosystem in the world, and play a critical role in maintaining the health of the Great Lakes region. The forests are a globally important resource as they help protect the natural resources we depend upon, including clean air and clean water."

"Michigan's timber and tourism industries alone contribute more than \$20 billion to the state's economy," noted Speaker Johnson. "For many communities across Michigan, their future is directly affected by the health and management of our state forests."

Speaker Johnson and Senate Majority Leader Sikkema announced that they have asked State Representative Tom Casperson, R-Escanaba, and State Senator Gerald Van Woerkom, R-

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Norton Shores, to lead hearings in the House and Senate to review the major stewardship and management issues facing Michigan's state forest system.

The hearings will focus on:

- Ways to promote and encourage the use of state forests for forest products, tourism and outdoor recreation;
- The needs of the forest products industry, including annual goals for treated acres;
- The need of local communities, outdoor recreation interests and the tourism industry;
- Assuring proper landscape management planning for state forests, incorporating biodiversity conservation goals, indicators and measures;
- Establish statutory standards for sustainable forestry, including potential third-party certification requirements; and,
- Identification of environmentally sensitive areas needing additional protection.

Hearings on the state's forest system are scheduled to begin in the fall.